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ABSTRACT

The University of Glamorgan (Wales) conducted a research project to determine the counseling and guidance needs of its mature students. The project's long-term objective was to develop a new institutional policy for a coordinated guidance and counseling system reflecting the different needs, perceptions, and situations of students and staff, and its short-term objectives were to develop a student support system and staff training programs to meet the counseling/guidance needs of older students. During the project, researchers gathered data through a pilot questionnaire, progressively focused semistructured interviews of students and staff, and group discussions with staff. Data from the survey, interviews, and group discussions were analyzed by using complete and partial transcription methods. A proposal was drafted for a comprehensive system guidance/counseling and tutoring services for mature students that would focus on the following areas/problems: personal tutoring (personal progress, accommodation, relationships, personal problems, and financial/legal welfare); vocational tutoring (development of self-preservation and career-vocational skills, institutional membership, and career choice/development); and academic tutoring (study skills and specific subject development, admissions, and option choice). (Contains 15 references.) (MN)

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Paper 6

Addressing the Counselling and Guidance Needs of Mature Students

Report of a project funded jointly by CNAA/UDACE and the University of Glamorgan

Project Director: B J Aldridge (Head of Student Services)
Project Manager: P R Horle Co-researcher: S.J. O'Donohoe

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Addressing the Counselling and Guidance needs of Mature Students

Report of a project funded jointly by CNAA/UDACE and The University of Glamorgan

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1. Introduction

1.1. Mature Students in the University of Glamorgan

The positive attitude of the University to increasing opportunities for this group is reflected in its mission statement to:

- provide comprehensive, accessible and high quality educational opportunities;
- develop research and related activities in order to extend knowledge and enhance teaching;
- provide consultancy and training services of the highest quality and relevance to the community, industry and commerce;
- contribute fully to the enrichment of the economic and cultural life of Wales;
- demonstrate a special care for our students and maintain our reputation for service and friendliness;
- realise the full potential of our staff.

Since the early 1970s the University of Glamorgan has actively sought to make its programmes accessible to mature students, especially those who live locally. A number of factors have contributed further to changing the age profile in the direction of increased participation of mature students. Demographic (Smithers and Robinson, 1989 and Employment Gazette, 1990), social (Schlossberg et al, 1989) and economic factors have combined

to provide a unique opportunity to redress certain inequalities of higher education provision. There will be an opportunity to broaden access to higher education, by including groups previously under-represented within this sector.

The changing age profile of the student population, with potentially decreasing numbers of traditional entry students and increasing numbers of mature students, will have implications for institutional guidance and counselling systems. Research has indicated that guidance can be particularly significant for adult learners in higher education, as these institutions can seem remote and intimidating (Horobin, 1987). This is not to suggest that mature students necessarily have a greater need for counselling and guidance, but that they often have different needs. Many mature students would seem, from (the) current research, to be relatively autonomous learners and reasonably self-sufficient in terms of personal support. However, the support that they do require differs significantly from that provided for the more traditional student, and is often a reflection of their different life situation and responsibilities. (Kearney and Diamond, 1990; Puryear and McDaniels, 1990; Long Island University Plan, 1987)

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Project

A research project into the counselling and guidance needs of mature students was conducted at the University of Glamorgan during 1991. The project was jointly funded by UDACE/CNAA and the University itself. We wish to distinguish between the short-term aims of the project and the contribution these will make to the long-term aims of the University. The relationship between the long and short-term aims of this project may be schematically represented in figure 1.

The LONG-TERM AIM of the project is:

- to develop a new institutional policy for a coordinated guidance and counselling system which reflects the different needs, perceptions and situations of students and staff;
- to develop appropriate internal and external structures to implement, coordinate, monitor and evaluate such guidance and counselling activities.

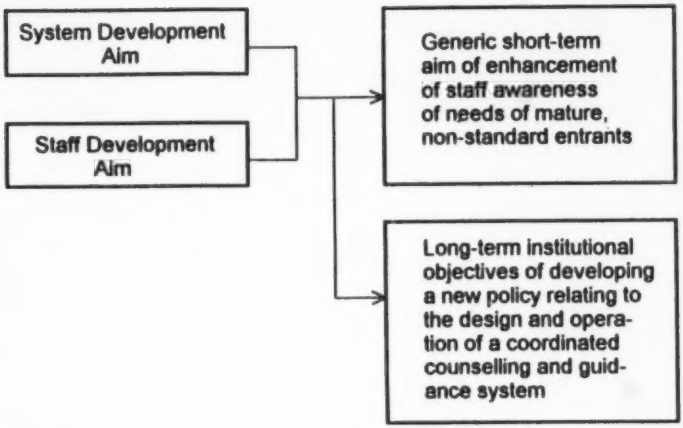
System Development Aim
Staff Development Aim
Generic short-term aim of enhancement of staff awareness of needs of mature, non-standard entrants
Long-term institutional objectives of developing a new policy relating to the design and operation of a coordinated counselling and guidance system

Figure 1 - Relation between the Long-term and Short-term Aims of the Project

The specific aims and objectives of this project are SHORT-TERM AIMS. They will promote the achievement of the long-term objective by exploring the effects of introducing a number of interventions designed to address the manifest, expressed needs of non-standard entrants.

The GENERIC SHORT-TERM AIM is to raise awareness of teaching staff of the needs of mature students, especially the differences they demonstrate when compared with traditional students in respect of motivation, attitude, experience, needs and total situation. This will be achieved through promoting:

- the development of a student support system which is widely accessible to full-time, part-time and prospective students/applicants, which is both centralised and localised as appropriate, and is coherent; the clarification of the relationships between the constituent services within this total system - SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT AIM.
- the development of staff training programmes in first-line counselling skills - STAFF DEVELOPMENT AIM.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Project Outline

The project was organised into four phases.

(a) Pilot Phase

Questionnaire conducted prior to project commencement.

(b) Initial Phase (Preliminary fieldwork)

Stage One: Analysis of enrolment data and selection of initial sample.

Stage Two: Development of interview structure, informed by an analysis of the pilot questionnaire.

Stage Three: Semi-structured interviews with students and staff. Progressive focusing, data evaluation and concept development leading to further semi-structured interviews with a theoretically derived subsample. (Interviews continued in parallel with later stages of research).

Stage Four: Review of data collection and concept development phase, leading to the identification of features to be incorporated within the intervention phase.

(c) Intervention Phase

Stage One: Promotion of awareness via discussion groups involving personal tutors from the selected course.

Stage Two: Workshops directed at the development of skill requirements identified via the interview stage and from information gained during the discussion groups were offered to staff from selected courses.

(d) Analysis Phase

Integration of data from earlier phases of the research, and the simultaneous development of guidance and counselling system design features directly related to and addressing the issues raised within the research. The analysis phase of the project had an integrative focus which combined data from all preceding phases, and directly related the data to the development of system design features. The research programme was informed by previous phases, forming an integrated research design as illustrated in figure 2.

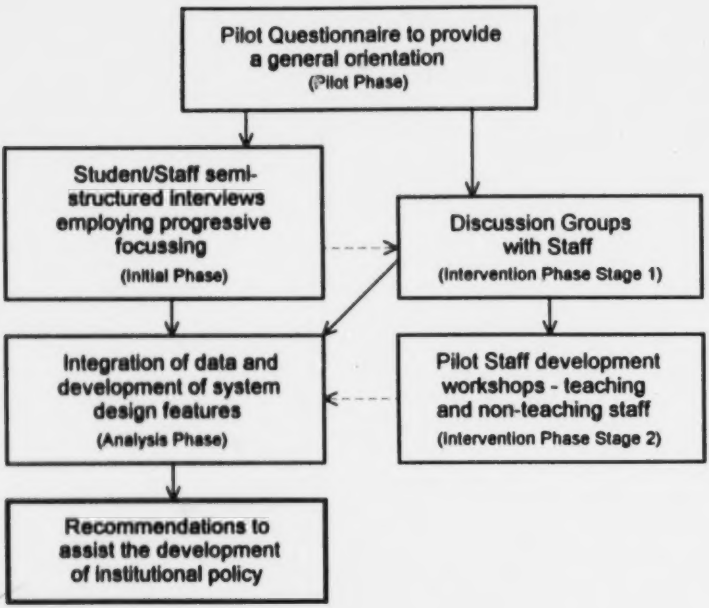
Pilot Questionnaire to provide a general orientation
(Pilot Phase)
Student/Staff semi-structured interviews employing progressive focussing
(Initial Phase)
Discussion Groups with Staff
(Intervention Phase Stage 1)
Integration of data and development of system design features
(Analysis Phase)
Pilot Staff development workshops - teaching and non-teaching staff
(Intervention Phase Stage 2)
Recommendations to assist the development of institutional policy

Figure 2 - The Research Methodology

A grounded theory approach was employed as a research methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1973). Progressive focusing and theoretical sampling techniques employed within the early phase of the research were utilised in order to inform the intervention phase of the project. The advantages of this methodology are:

(a) that a rich form of qualitative data may be collected;

(b) that the research does not restrict itself to the preconceived ideas of the researchers;

(c) that data collection is both responsive and reactive;

(d) that the design features, developed from the data analysis and integration phase, are based upon what the subjects themselves feel is important.

It is, of course, labour intensive; however, in order that the views and opinions of both staff and students are to be effectively taken into account it is felt to be the most appropriate methodology.

In order to ensure a representative sample, staff (42) and students (89) were selected from an Access course based at a local College of FE, B.A. (Hons) Humanities part-time and full-time, BSc. Building and LLB. (Hons) Law. The sample was quota based, but randomised within quota limits.

Interviews were semi-structured, with a limited set of basic questions employed in order to gather information related to the background of the subject. These questions were to obtain limited biographical details such as name, course, year, distance resident from University, previous educational experience, and qualifications, number of children and marital status. The remainder of the interview was unstructured and open in nature. Data derived via staff/student interviews were employed during Staff Discussion Groups, which were intended to raise awareness and to inform the design of appropriate staff development workshops. (The need for such staff development had been identified within the pilot questionnaire).

3. The Research Findings

3.1. Qualitative review: Categorisation and Concepts

From the interviews responses a chronological profile of the students was created, These results were then divided into the following chronological sections:

(1) pre-entry and transitional experiences;

(2) on-course guidance and counselling needs and evaluations of current response to these needs;

(3) pre-exit concerns.

3.1.1. Student Interview Review

❒ Pre-entry and Transitional Experiences

(a) Pre-entry guidance/course choice and the selection process: Student experiences are characterised by a lack of available information concerning the possible options. Where selection interviews are offered these are perceived as a one-way process of selection, generally not including impartial pre-entry guidance.

Students have emphasised the need for impartial guidance, and for more advanced information related to the specific course, e.g. timetables, (of particular importance in cases where child care provision needs to be arranged), workload and booklists. (1)[1]

> *"I wish I'd noticed right from the beginning that I wasn't on the right course. I wish there had been more rigorous selection, maybe in the first term." (2nd year student)*

Many students report that their first contact with the institution involved obtaining information from administrative, library, technical or departmental office staff, and that they were offered informal advice and guidance that was of considerable value. The role of support staff in terms of guidance provision seems currently to be largely unrecognised and ad hoc. (3,7,9)

[1] Numbers in brackets relate each concept item to the corresponding design features/characteristics - see section 4.2.

"The best advice I got was when I phoned up. I'm not sure who I talked to, but it wasn't a lecturer or anything. But she told me everything I needed to know." (2nd year student)

(b) Transition via various routes into higher education: Student experiences of transition indicate that Access courses are often a good preparation and provide suitable pre-entry experience. However, these courses appear to be highly variable in nature and better coordination between the feeder courses and this institution seems essential. Some students coming from Access courses where small, intimate courses are the norm, find the transition to the larger institution difficult.

"Everything seems so big, impersonal. That's the feeling I got, its all impersonal." (ex-access 1st year student)

A level entry students without recent educational experience, often find it difficult to adapt to the demands of academic study. One problem that needs to be addressed is the difference in marking codes between institutions. Student expectations of course work marks are often unrealistic, causing considerable stress.

"I was getting good grades on the Access course, now all I get is D's or C's. That's a bit of a shock after A's and B's. I feel sort of cheated." (Ex-access 1st year student)

Pre-entry study skills courses for students who did not require full access courses were suggested by several students. Students' lack of confidence in the first term may cause many to consider "dropping out". (1,7)

(c) Transmission of information related to Student Services: Lack of knowledge of the services provided and their locations is apparent despite inclusion within the induction programme, departmental visits, the distribution of Student Handbooks and posters promoting the service. (3,9)

(d) Financial support and guidance: Students voiced concern regarding their financial situation and the lack of pre-entry guidance in relation to these problems. Confusion related to funding arrangements exists (e.g. access fund eligibility) which adds to their anxiety. (1,2)

"I worked out how much I'd have, but I'm really in debt now, I was over-optimistic I think. I kind of expected to live on nothing." (3rd year student)

❒ **On-Course Guidance and Counselling Needs**

(a) Pressures created due to family responsibilities: Non-traditional students often have family responsibilities which at times conflict with their role as students. Certain groups such as single parents, mothers of young children and students responsible for the care of elderly relatives seem to be under considerable stress. In some cases it would seem that this is not taken into account by members of academic staff.

> *"I can't give my life to the course because I have a family, I have a home. You can't just say that's it for three years." (2nd year student)*

Several students report that their changed attitudes and opinions have led to friction in family and other significant relationships. Half-term breaks (e.g. reading weeks) which coincide with mid-terms were considered important by a significant number of students with child care responsibilities. (2,4)

(b) Positive contribution made by mature students: Non-traditional students make an important contribution by bringing valuable life experience and are often supportive of each other and younger students. They are often more confident in oral work than with written work, and in providing feedback to academic staff. (8)

> *"I tend to be the one they (younger students) turn to when they want advice on something, like an older sister." (3rd year student)*

(c) Self-help groups and mutual support systems: Non-traditional students often operate within informal mutual support systems both at an academic and personal level. Such groups not only enhance the social experience of those involved but provide a valuable resource which could be encouraged and facilitated. There may be a need to actively encourage the formation of self-help and mutual support groups during the first term of the first year, which seems to be a crucial stage for most non-traditional students. It would seem that some students require encouragement in order to form such groups, but that where these groups operate students seem able to overcome their feelings of isolation. Students also expressed a desire for contact with students who had already completed their first year. (8)

"We started talking to each other for five minutes in the break, now we meet up regularly in the library. It's easier to work on problems with other people who have the same problems." (2nd year student)

(d) Study skills requirements: The research has identified this area as a major difficulty. Most have identified the need for course specific rather than general study skills courses. The research indicates that study skills need to be effectively integrated within courses. Preference for a neutral source of guidance, specifically from someone not involved in assessing students and who can provide individualised instruction when required. Such support could emphasise the development of individual learning styles rather than simply provide prescriptive study skills advice. The perceived lack of access to staff for support with study skills difficulties is a problem experienced by a large proportion of non-traditional students, particularly during the first year. (2,8,11,12)

(e) Teaching styles: Some older students reported difficulty in adapting to more informal teaching/learning styles, and a feeling of isolation as a result of studying alone for much of the time. (4).

"I love the informality, it's like breath of fresh air, but I thought when I first came here it was too informal." (2nd year student)

They often reported a feeling of lack of direction and felt that they required more individual contact with their tutors in order to clarify what was expected of them, and get feedback on completed assignments. (4)

"I'm never really sure what they expect, even now." (3rd year student)

(f) Comparison of differing personal tutor approaches: Courses within the sample employ a variety of different personal tutor approaches ranging from systems which students perceive as informal to formal allocation and contact systems. The stated preference was for an informal system which would enable students to select the most suitable members of staff to deal with specific problems, plus the opportunity to discuss problems with staff who did not teach or assess them.

"You're doing a course, you don't really want to appear a wally. I think I'd have found it easier if the personal tutor was not a lecturer on the course." (1st year student)

It is clear from the research that there is a need to clarify the personal tutors' role. (4,6)

Some students appear to be reluctant to approach counselling services with their problems because there is still a stigma attached to contacting a counsellor, while others preferred the "neutrality" offered by such a role. (10)

(g) Approachability of staff: When approaching a personal tutor students look for different qualities in their tutor. These can be related to the gender and age of the tutor or to the nature of the need. Common themes were that the personal tutor be known to the student, readily available, treat their concerns seriously and be prepared to listen before offering advice or guidance. Students approach tutors for a wide range of reasons and present a great diversity of problems. Some tutors are perceived as being more approachable when the nature of the problem is academic rather than personal. Lack of availability of staff was also perceived as a serious problem by many students.

"My personal tutor made me a cup of coffee, sat me down, really just let me talk. He didn't give any advice on anything. It was nice." (1st year student)

Several students reported that they had discussed various problems with support staff, and had found them to be helpful and supportive. It seems that the administrative, technical and library staff often offer informal advice and guidance that many non-traditional students find of value. (3)

"I'd rather ask one of the ordinary people here, you know, a secretary or a technician, someone like that." (3rd year student)

(h) Heterogeneous nature of non-traditional students: The diversity of mature students in terms of individual characteristics, responsibilities, past-experience, expectations and their needs requires a wide variety of responses. With the exception of course-driven demands (e.g. mathematical competence, writing skills etc.) there do not appear to be consistent differences of need between courses. However, mode of study is a significant

factor, with part-time students tending to be more isolated. Academic staff also have quite diverse characteristics and this has implications for the operation of an effective personal tutor system. (2)

(i) Course feedback and evaluation: The current methods of course feedback, e.g. questionnaires, student representatives and informal contact are perceived by some students to be inadequate. Feedback is important to the counselling and guidance system because it helps to promote a sense of empowerment to mature students.

> *"The class's way of dealing with things was to go muttering up to the refectory and hope everything would get better." (2nd year student)*

Alternatives suggested by students include a forum where students can present their views, an effective complaints procedure and an independent advocate, (who is neither a member of departmental staff nor a student) to represent their views. (6)

(j) Marginalisation of part-time students: Many part-time students regard themselves as not being real students. Some facilities are not easily available to them, especially if closed in the evening, while other facilities, such as the Students Union, are perceived as being for traditional students only. (2)

> *"I've never heard of Student Services. I may have seen it but I would instantly put something like that out of mind, thinking it was for full-time students." (2nd year student)*

❒ Post-Exit Preparation

(a) Vocational orientation: Students have identified a lack of vocational guidance input at the pre-entry and induction phases. Vocational guidance often has important implications for choice of options, modules and courses. This will be of particular importance as more courses convert to modular structures.

> *"I haven't got a clearer idea of what I want to do now job-wise. In fact I'm more confused than when I was in my first year. I definitely need guidance." (3rd year student)*

Many students have expressed a preference for vocational guidance to be embedded within the course. (1,11,2)

(b) Self-presentation skills: Students have expressed concern about their need to be trained in the skills associated with writing CVs, letters of application and interview technique. Provision across courses seems to vary considerably. (2)

> *"How to sell yourself...what have I got to sell, what have I got to offer this job? I don't honestly know." (3rd year student)*

(c) Employers' perceptions: A problem for many students is the perceived attitudes of employers towards mature job applicants.

> *"It's the outside world you need to work on, especially employers, and people's opinions of what a mature student is like and how they cope with life at college." (3rd year student)*

Students have suggested that the institution could have a role in promoting a more positive image of mature graduates. (7)

(d) Career options: It is apparent that the full range of career options related to particular qualifications are not fully appreciated.

> *"Nobody sits down with us in the third year and says now let's be imaginative about what you want to do." (3rd year student)*

Students have identified the need for more effective counselling in their choice of career. (2)

3.1.2. Chronological and Characteristics Profiles Summary

Data collected during the student interviews was analysed using complete and partial transcription methods and first categorised into the following chronological profile in terms of the concepts generated. This profile, focused upon stages, highlights aspects of guidance and counselling as they relate to student progression within/through the institution. Subsequently the data was reclassified into a characteristics profile grouped in terms of type which highlights the significant categories of issues presented by students.

CHRONOLOGICAL PROFILE

PRE-ENTRY AND TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCES

- Pre-entry guidance/course choice
- The selection process
- Transition via various routes into HE
- Transmission of information related to institutional support services
- Financial guidance and support
- Accommodation
- Pre-entry disability guidance

ON-COURSE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

- Family responsibilities
- Marital problems
- Illness/disability
- Self-help/mutual support groups
- Study skill provision
- Teaching style and student response
- Comparison of different personal tutor approaches
- Approachability of teaching staff
- The role of support staff in guidance provision
- Student feedback systems
- Marginalisation of part-time students

POST-EXIT PREPARATION

- The need to integrate career guidance
- More comprehensive vocational guidance
- Self-presentation skill development
- Promotion of more positive mature student image

CHARACTERISTICS PROFILE

PRE AND POST-COURSE

- Pre-entry guidance
- Course/modules/option choices
- Career/vocational advice

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

- Accommodation
- Financial
- General information related to institution
- Illness/disability
- Travel difficulties

ACADEMIC PROBLEMS

- Study skills
- Workload
- Attendance difficulties
- Problems with teaching style
- Course content difficulties
- Coursework problems (e.g. hand-in dates)
- Examination worries
- Lack of confidence

PERSONAL PROBLEMS

- Family/marital problems
- Friendship difficulties
- Problems with members of staff
- Difficulties with other students
- Gender related problems
- Outside commitments (e.g. work, family, child-care)
- Loneliness/isolation

3.1.3. Staff Interview Review

The analysis of data derived from staff interviews and discussions revealed that most members of staff perceived the area of personal problems (c.f. the characteristics profile) to be the most difficult for them to deal with. Many of the issues and concerns raised by students were echoed within the staff interviews and discussions. However, several important issues were specific to the staff interviews. Areas of concern specific to staff are discussed below.

❒ **Pre-entry and Transitional Experiences**

(a) Pre-course guidance: The lack of adequate pre-entry guidance and who should provide such guidance was of general concern. Some members of staff suggested that such guidance should be provided via a central service within the institution, with reference to them only when specific course or subject related issues were encountered. Many members of staff viewed the current arrangements as inadequate and considered this issue to be of considerable importance to non-traditional students. Several members of staff drew attention to the fact that many mature students do not come from family backgrounds that include experience of higher education. (1,2)

(b) Modularisation: Concern was expressed regarding the guidance implications of modularisation, both pre-course and within course. Many members of staff indicated that they expected an increased guidance role including vocational guidance (as a result of modularisation). The lack of course identity was considered an issue by many members of staff, particularly in relation to the Combined Studies Programme. (4,8)

(c) Implications of CATS, APL and APEL: The potential impact of CATS, APL and APEL was generally viewed positively, but there was uncertainty regarding how such selection and accreditation techniques would be implemented. Concern was expressed regarding the additional time required to employ such procedures. Clarification of the role of admissions tutors and potential increased workloads were considered important. (8)

(d) Pre-entry evaluation: The need for the development of a pre-entry system that could predict/diagnose potential problems, e.g. lack of effective study skills, literacy, numeracy, etc. The suggestion was made by several individuals that short pre-course study skills, diagnostic and developmental courses could be offered to non-traditional students in order to prepare them for entry into HE. Clearly not all non-traditional students require full access courses, but some form of quick refresher course with an element of confidence building and guidance on course/module choice, was suggested by

several members of staff as being a suitable means of reducing the problems that many mature students encounter during the first term. (1,8)

❒ **On-Course Guidance and Counselling**

(a) Lack of confidence and fear of failure: This was considered to be an important feature of mature students' anxiety during both the early stages of their course and again during their final year. Concern was expressed that the early anxieties of students coincided with an extremely busy time for themselves. (6,9,12)

(b) The role of the personal tutor: Many members of staff expressed confusion regarding the personal tutor system and acknowledged that a similar confusion existed among students. Lacking a clear definition of the role of the personal tutor, individuals had interpreted the role in a wide variety of ways. Several members of staff expressed concern that they were uncertain about what was expected of them, and also the implications of increased student numbers for the role. Some felt that the time and effort expended fulfilling their role as personal tutors was not supported, recognised or rewarded by the institution. Concern was also expressed concerning the lack of guidelines for referral and the lack of training. (5,7,9)

(c) Confidentiality: Members of staff who shared rooms invariably raised the issue of discussing confidential matters with a student in the presence of others. One of the departments within the sample had addressed this issue by providing a room specifically for counselling, thus avoiding the problem of trying to find some isolated corner in order to discuss sensitive issues with a student. The availability of a suitable area in which to talk confidentially, is a prerequisite of effective personal tutoring. The rooms utilised for such purposes should not, however, be identified by door signs as "The Counselling Room", but should be adequately managed and have suitable arrangements to indicate when the room is in use. (7,10)

(d) Course specific requirements: Discussions with staff from the range of courses indicates that differing approaches to the personal tutor system would be required by different departments/courses. The relatively informal approach adopted by one of the courses within the sample was considered to be unsuitable by staff from other courses/departments. Both student and staff characteristics were considered important factors in terms of the operation of an effective personal tutoring system. (6,4)

(e) Who should be personal tutors? A question addressed by several members of staff concerned whether all members of academic staff should be expected to take an active role as personal tutors. The implications of staff being able to opt out of the personal tutor role were raised by a number of staff. On several occasions the suggestion was made that some members of staff had already effectively opted out by appearing unapproachable. The personal characteristics of some members of staff were considered to be "off putting" to students, although it was generally acknowledged that such individuals may possess other important attributes. (4,6)

(f) Study skills: Study skills were perceived as being a major problem area. Estimates of the number of non-traditional students who seemed to require such help varied considerably, but most members of staff indicated that the numbers were significant. Concern was expressed that with increasing student numbers the amount of support that they could offer was limited. However it would seem that the amount of "help" required by most non--traditional students was relatively small and was associated with the building of confidence. (2,6,11)

(g) Self-help/mutual support groups: Encouraging students to set up such groups was seen by some members of staff as an effective means by which students could solve many of their problems themselves. Clearly such groups exist, in the form of friendship groups or loose associations of fellow students. However, few members of staff had actively encouraged the formation of such groups. (8)

(h) Mature students - a positive contribution: Recognition of the positive contribution made by mature students was emphasised by numerous members of staff, who wished to emphasise that they did not see mature students as being generally a problem, many of whom are quite self-sufficient in terms of their guidance needs and are frequently effective independent learners. Others seem to become self-sufficient very quickly following a brief period of uncertainty that often requires sensitive guidance and support. Their problems were however perceived as different from the problems of the more traditional entrant to HE and were perhaps more time consuming initially. It was generally thought that mature students are more interactive in lectures and seminars, and therefore facilitate the general learning experience for all students. (5)

❒ **Post-exit Preparation**

(a) Self-presentation skills: Many members of staff discussed the problems encountered by mature students related to self-presentation. Some offered help with writing CV's, letters of application etc., whereas others considered that this form of training was not their responsibility. Provision across courses seems to vary considerably. (1,2)

(b) Career/vocational guidance: Staff generally considered that career guidance was not really their concern, although most did in fact seem to provide such guidance, often in an informal manner. It was clear that many possessed considerable experience of the professions that their students intended to enter, and that this intimate knowledge and understanding was of considerable value to students considering career choices. A team approach with both academic staff and careers guidance staff being involved in vocational guidance was considered an appropriate solution by several members of staff. (1,2)

(c) Employers perceptions of mature graduates: A large number of staff discussed the problems of mature students when faced with the prospect of attempting to gain employment, and negative perceptions of employers regarding mature graduates. It was pointed out that many mature students almost expected to be rejected in view of their age, which was not always the case. Some thought that the institution should actively promote the image of mature students to employers, who were considered to have a negative image of mature students. (7)

3.2. Quantitative Analysis

The perceived relative importance of the issues identified in the qualitative analysis may be seen from the following tables based upon the frequency with which issues were identified by individual subjects.

STUDENTS	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Pre- and Post- Course	Careers/vocational advice	Pre-entry guidance	Course/module option choice
Practical	Financial	Lack of information	Accommodation; Illness/disability; Travel difficulties
Academic Problems	Study skills; Examination worries; Lack of confidence	Work-load; Problems with teaching style; Course content; Coursework problems	Attendance difficulties
Personal Problems	Outside commitments (work, family, etc.)	Family/marital; Friendship/ relationship; Loneliness/ isolation	Difficulties with members of staff /other students; Gender-related difficulties

Table 1 - Students' perceived relative importance of issues

STAFF	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Pre-entry Transitional		Pre-course Guidance; Guidance implications of modularisation	Implications of CATs, APEL; Pre-entry Evaluation/ selection
On-Course Guidance	Lack of confidence/Fear of failure; Role of personal tutor; Confidentiality; Study skills problems; Acknowledgement of mature student contribution; Need for the institution to recognise/ value the personal tutor role	Lack of information re Student Services; Referral issues need for clarification; Need for course specific; Potential for self-help groups	
Post-exit Preparation			Lack of Self-presentation skills; Develop career guidance provision; Active promotion of image of mature students

Table 2 - Staff's perceived relative importance of issues

3.3. Review of the Discussion Groups and Pilot Staff Development Workshops

Discussion groups were arranged involving teaching staff from the selected courses. Data from preliminary fieldwork combined with information from the discussion groups were employed in order to define specific objectives, to raise awareness and inform the development of the workshops. The pilot workshops were therefore directly linked to and grounded in the previous research stages.

The workshops focused upon the need for specific skills, i.e. active listening skills. The content and skills were fully integrated within the workshop forming a parallel presentation. The workshops formed part of the project in two ways: by raising awareness of the needs and contributions of mature students, and by informing the views of the researchers concerning the issues addressed.

3.3.1. Staff Workshops

Pilot staff development workshops were developed for academic staff. However, student interviews revealed the importance of guidance from support staff. Therefore similar workshops were developed for non-teaching staff.

The general aims and objectives of these workshops were to enable staff to gain an understanding of the needs of mature students, to examine the role of personal tutors/support staff in dealing with problems presented by mature students, to practice some of the prerequisite interpersonal skills underpinning these roles (especially active listening) and to develop a clear understanding of the role of Student Services, the Educational Development Unit, and the range of services they provide.

The effectiveness of the pilot workshops was assessed by an independent evaluator. Particular outcomes of the pilot workshops that relate to the awareness raising aspect of the project were:

(a) A group of 14 students, who attended the open forum discussion element of the workshop, formed a Mature Students Society . They currently have 98 members and have arranged self-help child care facilities during the half-term school holiday.

(b) An informal women's mutual support group invited a member of

teaching staff to join them as a facilitator following a discussion during the open forum element of the workshop.

(c) Two experienced members of teaching staff requested that they repeat the video role play exercise on the next occasion that the workshops are held.

(d) Numerous enquiries concerning future plans for support staff workshops have been received from staff outside the selected departments.

3.4. Concluding Remarks

Clearly not all non-traditional students have problems within higher education and many mature students are quite autonomous learners. Of those that do require some support, most seem to be able to adapt relatively quickly to the HE environment. The first year is almost universally perceived as the most difficult time and is characterised by feelings of uncertainty, confusion, self-doubt and lack of confidence. Compared to the more traditional student, the early experience is characterised in terms of the sense of dis-empowerment. For some individuals who were previously used to making their own decisions, a shift from an internal locus of control to an external locus of control occurs. Many find themselves being told what to do and where to go, and more importantly, they expect and accept this and appear to lose a sense of control and significance at a time when they need it most.

Attrition among mature students seems to be associated more with the student's reaction to the experience of entering higher education than difficulties related to academic progress. (Within the sub- sample interviewed only 20% attributed their abandonment of studies to academic or practical problems.) For some, the long and eagerly anticipated entry into the world of higher education is transmuted into a devastating experience of personal failure. Many students for whom the transition to higher education proved difficult (both those that survived and those that did not) failed to find the kind of support that would have assisted them. However, it must be emphasised that the research has also identified many examples of extremely high quality support, both in terms of central institutional provision and within courses, provided by sensitive, concerned and dedicated individuals. It is, however, clear that the idea that guidance and counselling within an HE context can be provided as an add-on service should be abandoned, in favour of a view of such provision being an integral element of good course design.

4. Guidance and Counselling Provision

4.1. System Design

One of the original aims of the project was to develop a proposal for an adequate system of guidance and counselling for the University, this was termed the System Development Aim. In order to design any system, it is first necessary to produce a specification of what that system is intended to achieve. The specification, presented as a series of design features and characteristics, is related directly to and based upon the different needs, perceptions and situations of students and staff, and articulates the expressed views of both staff and students, informed, in many cases, by examples of good practice currently observable within the institution.

4.2. Institutional System Design Features/Characteristics

1. Continuity: guidance and counselling provision operated as a continuous process, from pre-entry to post-exit, including a suitable level of student-personal tutor association, during the whole of the student's time within the institution.

2. Comprehensiveness: inclusive of all aspects of support, guidance and counselling i.e. personal, academic, social, vocational and post-exit, and is available to all students i.e. part-time, associate, post- graduate, full-time, etc.

3. Accessibility: all students have equal access to adequate levels of support; the system of support, at both the institutional and course based level, is clearly communicated to all students and staff.

4. Flexibility: courses/departments/modules may negotiate the detailed structure of local systems of support (to suit particular requirements); such systems are responsive to individual student needs.

5. Recognition: the importance of academic and personal tutoring to the institution be recognised explicitly.

6. Effectiveness: both central and local systems of support actively address student needs and are centrally monitored and reviewed.

7. Networking: the institutional guidance and counselling system provides adequate liaison with Guidance Services in the Community, local feeder colleges and employers; the internal network facilitates effective and sensitively applied referral procedures.

8. Innovative: systems of support are able to adapt to institutional change; initiatives to introduce new methods of student support are encouraged, e.g. self-help and mutual support group facilitation, supplemental instruction, confidence building, student autonomy programmes, student empowerment activities etc.

9. Coordination: both the institutional and course based systems of student support are centrally coordinated, inter-related and monitored. This function should include the co-ordination of appropriate in-service staff development and training.

10. Defined Confidentiality: confidentiality limits are made explicit.

11. Integrated: support, where appropriate, is embedded within courses.

4.3. The Internal System

In order to implement the system design features/characteristics it will be necessary to construct a suitable mechanism in terms of organisational structure. An examination of existing organisational structures, in particular the structure currently in place related to the institution's Policy for the Disabled, has indicated that a similar organisational structure is appropriate for the implementation of the Guidance and Counselling Design Features/characteristics. The proposed structure requires that a Guidance and Counselling Standing Support Group is established, composed of representatives from all departments, centres and divisions (with the possibility of including student representatives and representatives from local guidance services). This would facilitate communication between the various elements of the guidance and counselling system, have the potential for increased cooperation throughout the institution and provide a forum for the exchange of ideas related to guidance and counselling. In addition it is recommended that Student Services be represented at course board level (or other appropriate organisational unit). The proposed structural organisation is illustrated in figure 3.

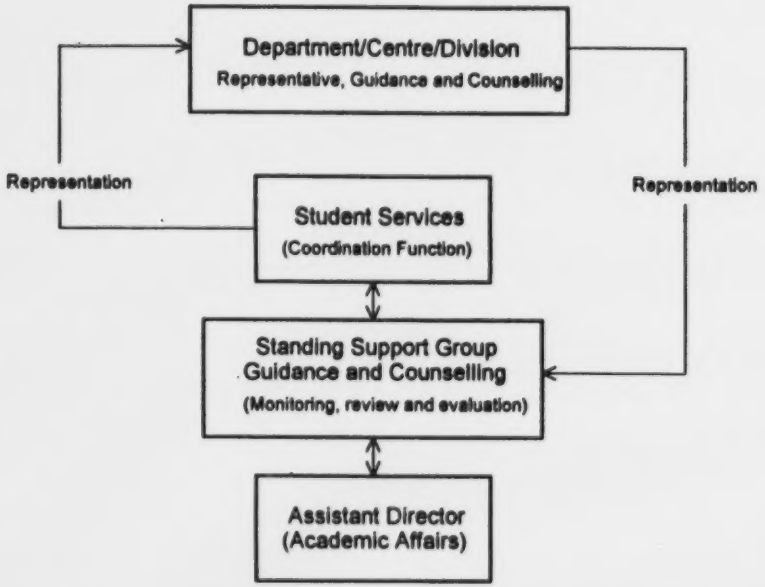

Figure 3 - Structural Features of an Integrated System of Institutional Guidance and Counselling

The schematic in figure 4 illustrates the nature of institutional guidance and counselling in terms of type/category of activity, all of which are coordinated as outlined above.

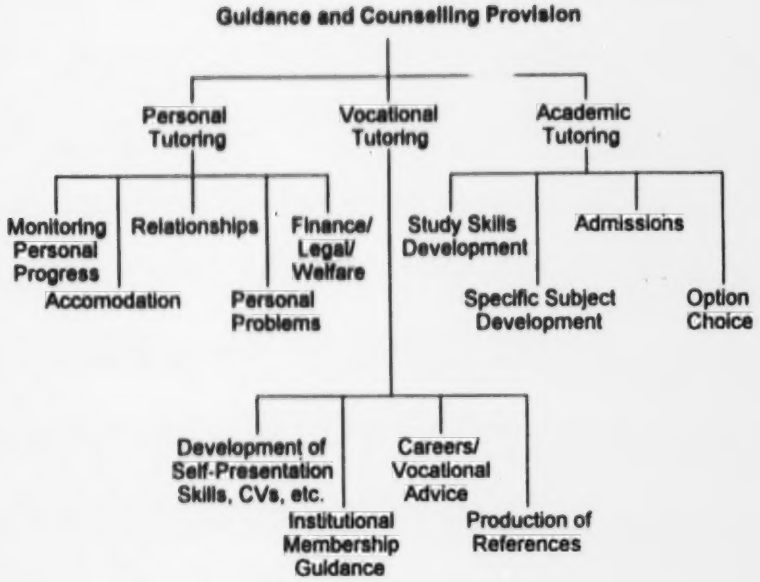

Figure 4 - Various Activities/Services to be delivered at Local and/or Central Levels as appropriate

4.4 The Role of the Personal Tutor

The research has highlighted the need to clarify the role of the personal tutor and to establish a minimum requirement for this role.

It is proposed that a basic minimum requirement for personal tutors should be that they facilitate conditions which enable the student to express/identify their problem and are then able to make a suitable referral in an appropriate manner; or deal with the issue together. Personal tutors would be expected to possess a range of skills and a suitable knowledge base to carry out this minimum requirement effectively.

Especially if students do not take the initiative to approach their tutors, personal tutors need to signal their availability/approachability. They may

also need to make the initial contact themselves especially if they notice a student in distress. They therefore need a sufficient level of awareness, and the perceptual skills to notice signs of stress, drug dependency, depression, anxiety, loneliness and lack of confidence/assertiveness among students.

Whether it is the personal tutor or the student who makes the initial contact, personal tutors require adequate listening skills, self-awareness and an appropriate knowledge base to be facilitative. Being facilitative includes working with the student to define the problem, if there is one, and deciding together on an appropriate course of action. Where necessary this includes the ability to make an effective and sensitive referral, which requires a knowledge of other support services available.

Self-awareness is required in so far as the tutor needs to be clear about the relationship with the student, in order to make an informed decision about what course of action to take if any.

Other important issues that need to be addressed include confidentiality within the tutor/student relationship and the provision of adequate resources, support and training for personal tutors, Such considerations were identified as being particularly important during this research project. Within an educational context the role of the personal tutor may be expressed as illustrated in figure 5.

5. Conclusion

The results of this project represents an important stage in the development of a guidance and counselling provision in the University of Glamorgan. The national and institutional funding has "pump-primed" the work described in this research and has thereby ensured the expressed short-term aims to be accomplished in a commendably short time. However, these short-terms aims are seen as contributing to the long-term aim of the University - namely to develop a new policy for a coordinated guidance and counselling system which reflects the different needs, perceptions and situations of students and staff, and to develop appropriate internal and external structures to implement, coordinate, monitor and evaluate such guidance and counselling activities. It is to the achievement of the long-term aims that the University's attention will now be directed:

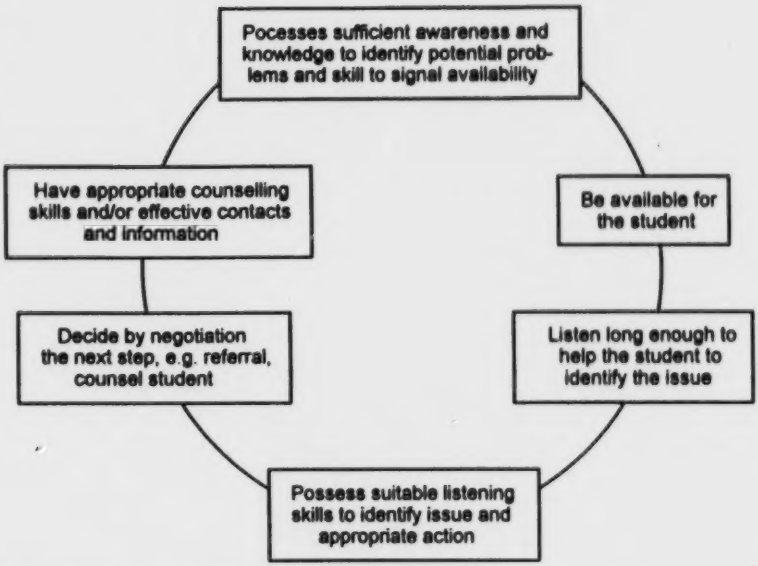
Pocesses sufficient awareness and knowledge to identify potential problems and skill to signal availability
Be available for the student
Listen long enough to help the student to identify the issue
Possess suitable listening skills to identify issue and appropriate action
Decide by negotiation the next step, e.g. referral, counsel student
Have appropriate counselling skills and/or effective contacts and information

Figure 5 - The Role of the Personal Tutor

(a) through a series of faculty seminars to disseminate the findings and proposals within the institution;

(b) through discussions with the participating departments in order that the findings may inform appropriate changes in their guidance and counselling provision;

(c) through an offer to engage in more detailed work with the departments who were not selected to participate in the project in order to assist them in the review of their guidance and counselling provision;

(d) through a formal proposal to Academic Board to implement the proposals contained in this report over a two year period. ❖

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